United Nations E/CN.6/2010/NGO/8

# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 December 2009

Original: English

**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Fifty-fourth session**
1-12 March 2010
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

## Statement by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.

09-63939 (E) 060110

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## Statement

1. On the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women reaffirms the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including sections D, G and H, in which Governments committed to: eliminate violence against women; enhance the position and numbers of women in power and decision-making; and institute mechanisms for the advancement of women.

2. The International Federation of Business and Professional Women represents the interests of working women from over 90 countries across five continents and has been in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1946. In 2010, the International Federation, known worldwide as BPW International, commemorates 80 years of advocating for gender equality and empowering women educationally, politically and economically in the societies in which they live.

### Women in power and decision-making

3. As a leading women's organization in the twenty-first century, the International Federation develops the business and professional potential of women at all levels and realizes that this century calls for an equitable world that sees women and men sharing decision-making roles. Women now drive the world economy. They represent a majority of the talent pool and a majority of the market, making over 70 per cent of consumer goods purchasing decisions in most regions. Globally, they control about $20 trillion in annual consumer spending, and that figure could climb as high as $28 trillion in the next five years. Women's total yearly earnings of $13 trillion could reach $18 trillion in the same period. In aggregate, women represent a growth market more than twice as large as that of China and India combined. Governments and the private sector can no longer overlook the knowledge, experience and expertise of women in their countries.

4. Women represent 60 per cent of university graduates in Europe and North America, in excess of 50 per cent in the Asia Pacific and 70 per cent in the United Arab Emirates. However, despite the fact that in many developed countries women now account for more than half of college and university graduates, job opportunities for women and the wages paid to them still lag behind those of their male counterparts even in developed countries, and these gaps are even larger in most developing countries.[1]

5. Investing in women's leadership and participation has brought about economic and social transformation in many countries, and it has been shown that a more equitable gender balance in leadership yields better corporate performance.[2] Companies with more women in leadership have a 35 per cent higher return on equity; companies with more than three women on their corporate board have an 80 per cent higher return on equity. Quotas or other affirmative measures have been adopted to increase women's representation in political decision-making in a number of countries (including in some troubled countries), achieving in excess of

[1] Her Excellency Chan Heng Chee, Ambassador of Singapore to the United States of America, in her keynote address at the fourteenth Women Leaders Network Meeting, Singapore, 4 August 2009.

[2] 20-first, Waking up to Women-omics, http://www.20-first.com/.

30 per cent representation of women in national parliaments, but despite these advances, gender inequalities in leadership positions are still striking.

6. We call on Governments to recognize these inequalities and to accelerate progress in the placement of women in senior positions. We call on Governments to make a collective commitment to work with the private sector to increase the proportion of women in decision-making roles.

**Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women: creation of a new United Nations gender entity**

7. The International Federation supports and congratulates the General Assembly on the unanimously adopted landmark resolution on system-wide coherence of 14 September 2009 (General Assembly resolution 63/311), which will lead to the creation of a strong unified women's rights and gender equality entity led by an Under-Secretary-General.

8. For more than 50 years BPW International has worked with a wide range of partners to advance women's human rights, empower and help women access social and economic opportunities and assist countries in achieving societies that are free of violence, poverty and discrimination. The system as it now exists is simply not working well enough to deliver effective results to improve women's lives around the world. It urgently needs to be improved and strengthened.

9. Recognizing that the fifteenth anniversary of the historic Fourth World Conference on Women is approaching, with many of its promises still unfulfilled, BPW International demands that progress on forming the new gender entity be visible by the time of the review by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March 2010. We urge Member States to agree without further delay on a proposal and come to agreement on outstanding issues such as the governance of the new entity. We urgently request that donor countries pledge substantial funding to enable the $1 billion target to be reached in order to support the proposed strong field operations that the entity must have if the promises made by Governments and the United Nations to deliver results for women on the ground are to be realized.

10. To date, the regional meetings of non-governmental organizations on the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference in Asia and the Pacific and in Europe and North America have affirmed the importance of creating system-wide coherence and a strong gender entity. The Commission on the Status of Women review in March is the time to take this process to the next stage.

**Participation by non-governmental organizations in the process**

11. BPW International brings 80 years of grass-roots experience in the field, working nationally, regionally and internationally to advance women's rights and improve their daily lives, building on the diverse voices of other women's non-governmental organizations. BPW International believes that heeding the experiences and voices of non-governmental organizations will be critical to the success and sustainability of the new women's entity.

12. Realizing the vital role that civil society organizations have always played in the work of the United Nations in the field of women's rights, we urge Member States and the Secretary-General to commit to the systematic and ongoing

participation of civil society, particularly women's organizations, at every stage of the process at global, regional, national and local levels, including in the governing board.

13. We stress that in order to deliver for women everywhere there must be systematic and meaningful participation of civil society representatives in the governance structure, as well as in the operations of the new gender entity. Recognizing the critical importance of tapping into the grass-roots expertise of non-governmental organizations, the "Gender Entity Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign" has proposed the creation of civil society advisory bodies at the global, regional and national levels, and has requested that a mechanism be developed for ongoing input from non-governmental organizations into the governance of the new gender entity.

**Under-Secretary-General**

14. We call on the Secretary-General to select a strong leader with significant stature, competence, credibility and experience in gender equality and women's human rights, including work at the global and country levels, as well as a track record in management and fund-raising. We ask that the selection of an Under-Secretary-General take place before the intergovernmental negotiations in March 2010, in accordance with the selection criteria developed by the GEAR Campaign for this post.

15. We further call on the leadership of the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and Member States to facilitate the intergovernmental process in an expeditious but effective manner in order to launch the new gender equality entity in 2010.

**Violence against women**

16. Violence against women has been recognized in the Beijing Platform for Action as "an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace".[3] Non-governmental organizations have urged the United Nations to recognize violence against women as a human rights violation and, as a result, Governments are introducing legislation dealing with domestic violence and establishing commissions to address violence against women.

17. The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, together with its Optional Protocol, which empowers the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to hear complaints of rights violations brought by individuals, is one of the main human rights conventions of the United Nations and an invaluable tool for implementing the provisions of the Beijing Platform for eliminating violence against women. To date, 186 countries have ratified the Convention and 98 of these countries have ratified the Optional Protocol. The year 2010 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention and the tenth anniversary of its Optional Protocol.

18. The Convention's thirtieth anniversary provides an occasion to celebrate its near universal ratification, as well as the recent progress that has been made at national levels to implement it and make true gains for women's and girls' rights on

[3] Beijing Platform for Action, strategic objective C.5.

a practical, everyday level. As a result of this Convention and the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action, several countries now have national action plans to combat violence against women. In addition, laws and policies are being adopted to strengthen women's economic security and rights in such vital areas as decent employment and access to credit and markets. But there is more work to be done. The leadership that has already been demonstrated should provide a platform to support States that lack the knowledge, commitment or legal framework to fully implement the Convention within their jurisdictions.

19. BPW International therefore stresses the importance of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to women and nations on this thirtieth anniversary, calling on all Member and Observer States to ratify the Convention and its Optional Protocol without any reservations in order to help achieve the goal of a world free of violence against women, as envisioned in the Beijing Platform for Action.